



U.S. ARMY COMBAT READINESS/SAFETY CENTER

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Danger stalks the highways

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Outside combat, the most dangerous thing most Soldiers will ever do is drive their privately owned vehicles. Because driving seems so much safer than combat, many Soldiers drop their guard and make risky choices. Those choices are a form of indiscipline and can be as deadly as any enemy.

How does indiscipline kill Soldiers? Army accident reports from the first three quarters of fiscal 2012 reveal three common themes: speeding, failure to wear seat belts and driving under the influence.

Nearly half the Soldiers who died on the road were speeding and lost control and crashed. Speeding reduces reaction time, increases stopping distances and makes it harder to maneuver a vehicle. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, every 10 mph you travel above 50 mph doubles your chances of dying in an accident.

Also, many Soldiers don't wear seat belts, a factor in nearly 30 percent of Soldier driving fatalities. Unrestrained, they were thrown into steering wheels and dashboards or through windshields or other windows. Unrestrained drivers and front-seat passengers double their chances of being killed or seriously injured, according to NHTSA — and there's an even uglier statistic. Ejected occupants are 25 times more likely to die than those who remain inside the vehicle.

Alcohol is the deadly ingredient underlying many acts of indiscipline, especially failure to wear seat belts. Drunk drivers are twice as likely not to wear their seat belts as sober drivers, according to NHTSA.

Alcohol is dangerous because it interferes with good judgment, said former Virginia State Trooper Wendell Cosenza. Nearly killed by a drunken military member on an interstate, he has strong feelings about the issue.

"When you drink alcohol, from the very first sip, it affects your judgment," said Cosenza. "If you've had a few drinks and you're walking out to your car saying, 'I can make it home,' remember you're talking to a drunk."

"What makes these accidents particularly tragic is that nearly all of them could have been avoided," said Lt. Col. Scott Wile, driving director at the U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center. He added it's not exposure to traffic or a lack of training that kills most Soldiers on the road, it's their indisciplined choices to willfully violate the standards they know.

For more information on driving safety, visit <https://safety.army.mil>.